



Research Starter Kit

finding sources • reading papers • designing your first study

a Daeva Collective guide

01 · Welcome & How to Use This Kit

Hi, and welcome! This little guide was made by Daeva Collective to help you go from “I have no idea where to start” to “I can actually do this” with research. Whether you're prepping for a debate round, writing a paper, or designing your very first study, this kit breaks the process into three friendly parts.

What's inside

- ♥ **Part One:** how to find sources you can actually trust
- ♥ **Part Two:** how to read a dense academic paper without crying
- ♥ **Part Three:** how to design a simple, beginner-friendly study of your own

You don't have to read this front to back in one sitting, each part stands on its own, so feel free to jump to whatever you need right now. Look for the pink star sections for big ideas, and the lavender boxes for quick tips and checklists.

◆ Tip

Keep a notebook (digital or paper) next to you as you go, you'll be asked to jot a few things down along the way!

02 · Part One: Finding Good Sources

Good research starts with good sources. A source is anything you pull information from: a study, an article, a book, an interview, even a dataset. Before you dive into databases, it helps to know the two broad categories you'll be working with.

Primary vs. Secondary Sources

- ♥ **Primary** — Original material, the raw study, the interview transcript, the dataset, the historical document itself.
- ♥ **Secondary** — Something that analyzes or comments on primary material, a news article, a textbook, a review paper.

Where to Actually Look

Skip the random first page of a search engine and go straight to places built for research:

- ♥ **Google Scholar** — great first stop for academic papers across every field
- ♥ **Your school or local library databases** — often free access to JSTOR, EBSCO, ProQuest
- ♥ **.gov and .edu sites** — government data and university research, usually reliable
- ♥ **PubMed** — for anything health or biology related
- ♥ **SSRN / arXiv** — early research papers (pre-prints) in social science, physics, and CS

Avoid building an argument entirely on forums, personal blogs, or AI-generated summaries with no citations, they can be a starting point for ideas, but trace any claim back to where it actually came from.

03 · Evaluating a Source: the SHARP Test

Found something promising? Before you cite it, run it through this quick five-point check. It's a beginner-friendly twist on the classic CRAAP test used in research methods classes.

S — Source	Who wrote this? What are their credentials or affiliation?
H — How recent	When was it published or last updated? Does that matter for your topic?
A — Agenda	Could the author or funder benefit from a certain conclusion?
R — References	Does it cite its own evidence, or just assert things?
P — Purpose	Is it trying to inform, persuade, sell, or entertain?

If a source fails two or more of these, treat it as background reading only, not something to cite as evidence.

Quick Red Flags

- No author listed and no organization behind the site
- Numbers or stats with no link to where they came from
- Extremely emotional language instead of evidence
- A publish date that's missing entirely

04 · Part Two: How to Read a Paper

Academic papers are not written to be read start to finish like a novel, they're written to be searched. Once you know the structure, you can pull out what you need in a fraction of the time.

The Smart Reading Order

Instead of reading top to bottom, try this order:

- 1 1. Abstract
- 1 2. Conclusion / Discussion
- 1 3. Introduction
- 1 4. Figures & Tables
- 1 5. Results
- 1 6. Methods (only if you need to judge how trustworthy the results are)

This way, you decide whether the paper is even relevant before spending 20 minutes in the methods section.

05 · Anatomy of an Academic Paper

Section	What it is
Abstract	A short summary of the whole paper, question, method, and main finding in one paragraph.
Introduction	Why this topic matters and what gap in knowledge the paper is trying to fill.
Literature Review	A summary of what other researchers have already found on this topic.
Methods	Exactly how the study was done, who/what was studied, and the tools or steps used.
Results	What the researchers actually found, usually with charts, tables, or statistics.
Discussion	What the results mean, and how they fit into the bigger picture.
Conclusion	The short takeaway and what should happen next (more research, policy change, etc.).

Section	What it is
References	Every source the paper cites, useful for finding more reading.

Not every paper uses these exact labels, but almost all of them follow this basic shape.

06 · Annotation & Note-Taking

Reading without writing anything down means you'll forget most of it by next week. Try a simple color or symbol system as you read:

A simple marking system

- ♥ Star a sentence that states the main finding
- ♥ Question mark anything confusing, look it up later or ask someone
- ♥ Underline any number or statistic you might want to quote
- ♥ Circle names of other studies you might want to track down next

The One-Sentence Summary Trick

After finishing a paper, force yourself to summarize it in a single sentence before moving on. If you can't, you probably skimmed past the main point, go back to the abstract and conclusion.

◆ Example

"This study surveyed 200 teens and found that sleep before exams mattered more than total study hours."

07 · Jargon Glossary

Term	Definition
Hypothesis	A specific, testable prediction about what a study expects to find.
Correlation	Two things that change together, but don't necessarily cause each other.
Causation	One thing directly making another thing happen.
Sample size	The number of people, items, or events studied.
Peer-reviewed	Checked by other experts in the field before being published.
Statistically significant	A result unlikely to be due to random chance.
Control group	The group that does NOT receive the treatment being tested, used for comparison.

Term	Definition
Bias	A factor that skews results away from the truth.
Literature review	A summary of existing research on a topic.
Meta-analysis	A study that combines and analyzes results from many other studies.

08 · Part Three: Designing Your Study

Now for the fun part, designing something of your own! You don't need a lab or a grant to run a beginner-friendly study. You need a clear question, a simple plan, and a way to keep your results honest.

The Basic Flow

- 1 1. Pick a question
- 1 2. Choose a study type
- 1 3. Decide who/what you'll study
- 1 4. Collect your data
- 1 5. Analyze & write up what you found

09 · Choosing a Research Question

A good beginner research question is specific, answerable with the time and resources you have, and genuinely curious, not just “yes/no.”

Too broad	Does social media affect mental health?
Better	How does daily Instagram use relate to self-reported stress among 14–16 year olds at my school?

The FINE Check

Ask yourself...

- ♥ **Feasible** — can I realistically study this with the time and access I have?
- ♥ **Interesting** — do I actually want to know the answer?
- ♥ **Narrow** — is it specific enough to answer, not a whole field of study?
- ♥ **Ethical** — can I study this without putting anyone at risk?

10 · Study Types

- ♥ **Survey** — Ask a group of people structured questions. Great for opinions, habits, self-reported behavior.
- ♥ **Experiment** — Change one variable and measure the effect on another, ideally with a control group.
- ♥ **Case study** — A deep dive into one person, group, or event, rich detail, but hard to generalize.
- ♥ **Observational study** — Watch and record behavior without intervening, no variable is changed.
- ♥ **Literature review** — Synthesize existing research on a topic instead of collecting new data.

Beginner tip: surveys and observational studies are usually the easiest entry point, they don't require manipulating anything, just careful, honest measurement.

11 · Variables, Sampling & Bias

Variables

- ♥ **Independent variable** — the thing you change or compare (e.g. hours of sleep)
- ♥ **Dependent variable** — the outcome you measure (e.g. test score)
- ♥ **Confounding variable** — a hidden factor that messes with your results (e.g. stress level affecting both)

Sampling

Your sample is who you actually study, it should represent the bigger group you're trying to draw conclusions about. A sample of 10 friends won't tell you much about “teenagers” in general, and that's okay to acknowledge as a limitation.

Common Beginner Biases to Watch For

- **Sampling bias** — only surveying people easy to reach (like your own friend group)
- **Leading questions** — wording that nudges people toward an answer
- **Self-report bias** — people not answering 100% honestly about sensitive topics
- **Confirmation bias** — only noticing data that supports what you already believed

12 · Research Ethics Basics

Even a small student study involves real people, so a few ethical basics matter from the start.

Before you collect any data

- ♥ **Informed consent** — tell participants what the study is about and that it's voluntary
- ♥ **Anonymity** — don't collect names or identifying info unless truly necessary
- ♥ **Right to withdraw** — participants can stop or skip questions any time, no pressure
- ♥ **No harm** — avoid questions or tasks that could cause distress, especially with minors
- ♥ **Honesty** — don't deceive participants about the real purpose unless absolutely required, and explain afterward if you do

If your study involves anyone other than yourself, it's good practice to have a teacher, mentor, or program advisor review your plan first.

13 · Your Study Design Worksheet

Fill this in as you plan, it's your whole study on one page.

My research question:	
Study type I'm using:	
Who/what I'm studying (and how many):	
Independent variable:	
Dependent variable:	
How I'll collect data:	
Possible biases to watch for:	
How I'll keep this ethical:	

14 · Cheat Sheet & Closing

Quick Recap

- ♥ Run sources through the SHARP test before citing them
- ♥ Read papers abstract → conclusion → intro → results → methods
- ♥ Summarize every paper in one sentence before moving on
- ♥ Check your research question with FINE: feasible, interesting, narrow, ethical
- ♥ Watch for sampling bias, leading questions, and confirmation bias
- ♥ Always get consent and protect anonymity

That's the whole kit! Research can feel intimidating at first, but it's really just structured curiosity, ask a clear question, look in the right places, and stay honest about what you find. You've got this.

Made with love by Daeva Collective — a free, student-led community for research, debate, and leadership.

Questions? Reach us at daevacollective@gmail.com